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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000144

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, IO/UNP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UNFICYP](#) [CY](#)

SUBJECT: CHRISTOFIAS SEEKS EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH TALAT

REF: A. STATE 18922

[1](#)B. NICOSIA-EUR/SE EMAIL 2/26/08

[1](#)C. NICOSIA 94

[1](#)D. NICOSIA 123

[1](#)E. NICOSIA 134

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: "If Mehmet Ali (Talat) and I cannot solve the Cyprus Problem, who can?" pondered RoC President-elect Dimitris Christofias in his February 26 meeting with the Ambassador, their first gathering since the February 24 election. Greek Cypriots had selected Christofias due primarily to his moderate, pro-solution views and close ties with Turkish Cypriots, the President-elect claimed; he intended to justify their decision by winning early CyProb progress. His first tete-a-tete with Turkish Cypriot leader Talat, likely in late March, represented a vital first step in re-invigorating moribund negotiations. The Ambassador solicited a follow-on meeting to explain U.S. interests and programs in Cyprus, and Christofias welcomed the offer. END SUMMARY.

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POTUS Congrats Appreciated  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador sought the sit-down with Christofias to deliver President Bush's congratulatory letter (Ref A) and convey the Embassy's hopes that 2008 see significant progress in solving the Cyprus Problem. Surprisingly energetic and showing no signs of campaign exhaustion, the President-elect accepted the letter, read it appreciatively, and responded, "I'm glad Mr. Bush is not afraid of a Communist Cypriot president!" He immediately turned to the national issue, claiming that Greek Cypriots considered him a moderate, pro-solution politician whose uninterrupted, productive relations with Turkish Cypriot leaders made him better able to bring the sides together. "This is the significance of my victory!" Christofias asserted. A refugee from "occupied" Kyrenia himself, the President-elect understood that the island's de facto division had caused pain in both communities. With pro-solution leaders in place on both sides for the first time, however, the prospects for progress seemed bright.

[1](#)3. (SBU) "Greek and Turkish Cypriots are children of the same land," Christofias reasoned. While they might have different ethnicities, faiths, and languages, their customs and traditions were similar. "My friends the Turkish Cypriots have more in common with us than with Turks," he argued. Bringing the sides together on a settlement therefore was not impossible. The Ambassador agreed. To complement the formal negotiating process and build a more conducive environment for rapprochement, he suggested that

Christofias state publicly his desire for increased contacts between the T/C and G/C communities. A further, positive step might entail the government giving the green light to Greek Cypriot newspapers to carry advertisements from Turkish Cypriot firms (currently this practice is not illegal, but G/C publishers normally refuse the ads out of fear they'll be deemed "traitors").

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Seeking a Formal, Vice Social, Meeting  
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14. (C) Media reported recently Christofias's pledge to seek an early meeting with Talat; the Ambassador asked whether they had set a date. Late March/early April was his reply. Talat had telephoned on election night to congratulate the historic victory, Christofias revealed, and they briefly discuss the get-together. It would not be "to drink a coffee at Talat's house in Kyrenia," a commitment that presidential challenger Ioannis Kasoulides had made in order to break the inter-communal ice. Rather, Christofias sought a formal gathering under the UN's auspices, and would express this wish to UNFICYP head Michael Moller shortly.

15. (C) The July 8 agreement would dominate the leaders' gathering, Christofias predicted. He had to hear -- "directly from Mehmet Ali's mouth -- the Turkish Cypriots' version of why the sides had reached deadlock, and how they might break free. Could July 8 realistically bring progress? he wondered. Christofias aimed to find out first-hand at the late March meeting. He also agreed with the Ambassador that Talat's tone and message were spot-on in his February 25, negotiations-related press conference, boding well for future talks.

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An Unhelpful Step Backward?  
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16. (C) Not so perfect was Talat's most recent letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon (Ref B), the Ambassador warned.

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Talat's letter discounted the usefulness of the July 8 agreement and demanded reinstatement of the Annan Plan as a basis for future negotiations, the latter a clear G/C non-starter. Local P-5 ambassadors and UNFICYP's Moller had agreed the letter was unnecessary, inappropriately timed, and contradicted the T/C leader's press conference remarks. "That sounds like the voice of Turkey, not Talat," Christofias replied. His fellow community leader had a tendency to speak rashly, getting himself -- and now Christofias -- in trouble. The President-elect recollected an anecdote from an old comrade: "Talat began his political life as a Cypriot. Later he became Turkish Cypriot. Now he's a Turk." Christofias, by personally engaging the Talat early and often, hoped to make him Cypriot again. He promised to treat the latest letter coolly and impassionately.

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Opposition Subdued?  
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17. (C) Christofias concluded by discussing post-election internal politics. Relations between his AKEL and right-wing opposition DISY were bound to improve, he thought, a product of his outreach efforts, as House Speaker, to DISY leader Nikos Anastasiades. The right-wing party looked ready to rejoin the National Council, a consultative body of former presidents and representatives from all major parties which debates the RoC's Cyprus Problem policy. With DISY back on the Council, its support for any eventual settlement plan seemed more assured, Christofias ventured.

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Comment:  
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18. (C) Still aglow from his February 24 victory, Christofias remains convinced that he, unlike Tassos Papadopoulos, can solve the Cyprus Problem. We agree that the President-elect's pro-dialogue pedigree and friendly relations with Turkish Cypriots give him advantages the crusty Papadopoulos lacked, but Christofias should not underestimate the task. With Talat's recent letter to Ban, it would seem the inter-communal honeymoon may have ended after only 48 hours. And should Christofias break his "coolly/impassionately" pledge and respond by publicly touting the G/C's own redlines, we worry another opportunity for immediate CyProb progress could be lost.  
SCHLICHER